

Ritte protests against anti-hotel group

Leads Molokai march to oppose former allies

By Edwin Tanji
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KAUNAKAKAI — Ten years ago, Walter Ritte Jr., Dr. Emmett Aluli and Judy Napoleon held hands together in triumph over the opening of a public access to the beaches of West Molokai after a protest march conducted by the Hui Alaloa organization.

Yesterday, Ritte led another march that protested the efforts of Aluli, Napoleon and six other members of Hui Alaloa to block a proposed luxury hotel at Puu Kaiaka in the Kaluakoi Resort.

It was probably the inevitable followup of a split in Hui Alaloa that occurred when Ritte chose to work with the hotel developers, John and Stephen Thomas, while other leaders of the organization chose to contest the developer's request for county special management area permit.

According to Larry Helm, who organized the march with Ritte, the demonstration was aimed at persuading Hui Alaloa from seeking a reconsideration of the planning commission's approval of the project and to keep them from filing any appeals in court against the approval.

More than 50 Molokai folks marched through Kaunakakai carrying signs naming the Hui Alaloa members involved in the intervention and urging "No Appeals" or charging that it's "8 against Molokai."

The turnout for the march, held at midday, was smaller than some crowds at hearings held on the project. But Helm said he was satis-

fied that it did reflect the feelings of most folks on Molokai.

"This is good. It's a working day and it was organized at the last minute when we decided to do this," he said.

Ritte expressed a concern for jobs that would be created by a new hotel at Kaluakoi, in explaining his reasons for turning against his former comrades.

"The way I look at it, they have decided to stay in the same 10-year-old track and I have decided that things are different today . . . economically," he said. "My decision is based on the fact that Molokai is in an economic crisis right now. The rift started because I took the position we had to address the economic situation," he said.

Napoleon, who drove by the demonstration before returning to her office, said she understood Ritte's feelings but said she felt the division between them was a case of impatience on his part.

"Molokai has changed, slowly. All of us have changed. Walter wanted to see more action," she said. "He wants things to happen more quickly. But 10 years is not that much time."

"I am disappointed he changed to the way he's going right now. He's that way. He jumps from one thing to another. He just moved too fast," Napoleon said. She said she and the others recognized a need for jobs on Molokai, but she wondered if a new hotel was the best way to provide those jobs.

She said she felt that community leaders on the Molokai Task Force and state and county officials "have not made a real effort to find long-

lasting jobs for Molokai." Rather, there was a decision that tourism was the only way to go, she said. Then, there was the Sheraton Hotel built six years ago at Kaluakoi "and there still are people who don't have jobs," she said.

Ritte also had concerns about the types of jobs that are offered

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— Walter Ritte

through the visitor industry. He said he did not support the hotel to see Molokai residents end up in low-paying dead-end jobs.

"Molokai is aware. We're aware of the evils of tourism. We're aware of what it can do to our culture, looking at Waikiki and Kaanapali," he said.

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